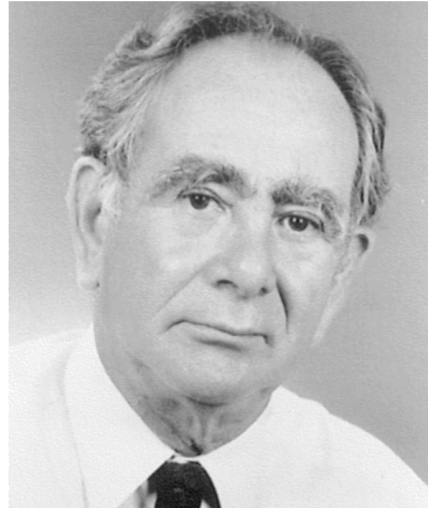
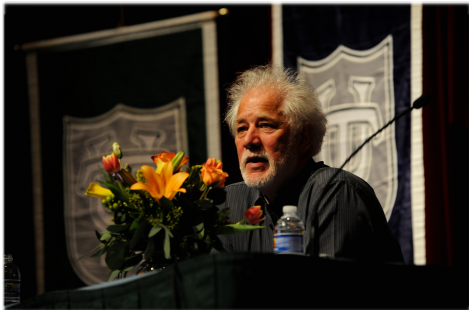
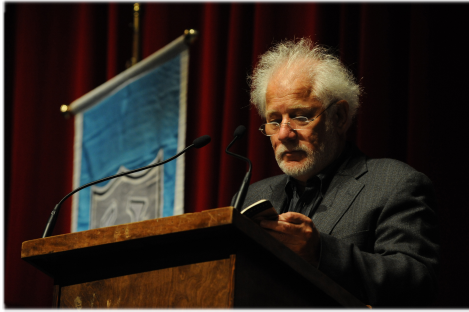


noted



An Interview with Donald Pizer

Emeritus Professor Donald Pizer is an award-winning, internationally renowned scholar of American literature. During his extraordinary 44-year teaching career, he has witnessed significant changes at Tulane and in the South. Here, in a lively interview with Professor Barry Ahearn, he reflects on his still vibrant career.

Don, let's begin with your early days at Tulane. Where were you beforehand and what brought you here?

I came to Tulane as a 28-year-old assistant professor in 1957, after spending two years in the army after my 1955 UCLA Ph.D. In those days, the MLA had neither a job list nor the annual meeting cattle call, so I was offered the position, in the usual fashion of that period, through my Ph.D. director who knew the chair of the Newcomb College English department. These were also the days, before the late 60s bust, when all was boom in Academia. There were plenty of jobs around—I had about a half-dozen offers, all handled through the mail. Many of these positions, however, were for instructorships, since the custom then was to offer an initial two-year instructorship as a prelude to a tenure-track assistant professor position. One attraction of the Tulane job was that it began with the assistant professor rank and also entailed immediate teaching in the major, something else usually not available to beginners. So my wife (my first wife, whom I had married in graduate school) and I decided to come to New Orleans and try out the school and city for a couple of years before probably moving on. Neither of us had ever visited New Orleans and we also had only a vague sense of Tulane as an academic institution.

In 1957 the university was organized a bit differently than it is now. How did that affect you and your colleagues?

I was hired by Newcomb College, which was Tulane's semi-independent women's undergraduate college. The entire College faculty was housed in Newcomb Hall, and we taught only women, except for graduate classes.

Cont. on page 3

Writer-in-Residence: Michael Ondaatje

[Click here to see photos of a lecture from our Writer-in-Residence, Michael Ondaatje](#)



Faculty Spotlight

Scott Oldenburg

interview by Natalie Schmidt

Congratulations to
Professor Scott Oldenburg
for winning the prestigious
Martin Stevens Award
for
Best New Essay
in
Early Drama Studies

faculty in action

To see the rest of our
faculty's newest books,
papers, articles, panels,
awards, and achievements,
click here!

Not only a noted scholar but also a student favorite, Scott Oldenburg is already making his presence felt in the English department. His new book project discussing nationality, guilds, and social identity continues his work in diversifying views of early modern England.

Dr. Scott Oldenburg came to us at Tulane in 2008 with ten years of previous teaching experience, a PhD from SUNY Buffalo, and an impressive list of publications. In the two years he's been here has already proven that his expertise and scholarship as well as his teaching presence in the English department are invaluable. In 2010, one of his recent articles, "Toward a Multi-Cultural Mid-Tudor England," published in *English Literary History*, won the Martin Stevens Award from the Medieval and Renaissance Drama Society for the best new essay in Early Modern drama studies; an article that provided a jumping off point for his nearly completed new book. Along with scholastic achievements, it's safe to say that even after only two years here, his position as one of the students' favorite professors has also been established. When a class of his students was asked what made him such a good teacher, grins broke out on all sides and students preceded to explain in stereo that he was *funny*, gave great practice in close reading, and made connections between pop culture and Renaissance literature that made the subject both approachable and interesting. Because of these achievements and the impact that Dr. Oldenburg has had on Tulane in such a short period of time we have chosen to highlight Scott's work and teaching hear a bit more from him about some details of his work and pedagogy that are making an impact on contemporary scholarship and on our university.

Before coming to Tulane, you had already published a now often-cited article that discusses the plasticity of racial constructs in early modern England, and now you are heading into a book project that discusses a similar flexibility in the concepts of early modern nation-hood. Do you find any overlap in these two projects? Are issues of solidarity as a nation and identification with race similar in their ability to be overcome by different, more localized group identities in the early modern period?

The book project on immigration and literature in the early modern period grew directly out of my earlier work on early modern race theory. I had just wrapped up that project and was attending a conference in Berkeley; one participant mentioned in passing something called the Dutch Church Libel, but when I asked questions about it, the speaker hadn't really delved into the document. I launched into researching the Dutch presence in England expecting to develop a paper that would build on my earlier work, expanding a dynamic of English vs. Other, but what I found was something much more complex, evidence of overlapping and at times contradictory alliances between the English and their immigrant neighbors. My earlier work dealt with the history of an idea of cultural difference, whereas my more recent work analyzes the way cultural differences are bridged by shared religious or economic projects, ultimately resulting in alternative forms of community grounded in cultural practices.

Your most recent article discusses the fact that the citizens of London spent a great deal of time and energy selling Queen Mary on the idea that foreigners were, in fact, a boon to the city, certainly financially and possibly culturally as well, rather than the detriment she seemed to believe they were. Along with providing proof that xenophobia was not as entrenched as previous scholars believed, this also presents an interesting power play between the monarchy and the merchant class. In your book, you plan to look at early modern guilds and social identity; do you treat guilds as a subset of social class?

Guilds are a good example of how complex social relations were in the period. On the one hand, artisans did have a sense of identity organized around their respective trades. On the other, guilds included not only apprentices and journeymen, but also their employers, and their interests were not always the same: what one sees in the early 1600s is a gradual consolidation of power in the hands of masters of the guilds and a marginalization of journeymen. The two poles of this controversy are evident in the texts of the two great artisan-class writers of the period: Thomas Deloney, a weaver, balladeer, and proto-novelist was actively involved in protesting the creation of a guild oligarchy while John Taylor, the water-poet, was very much a part of the guild elite. This, rather than xenophobia, is at the heart of artisan-class worries about immigrant labor in the early modern period. ♦

Pizer - Cont. from page 1

(This lasted until the 70s, when classes began to be mixed, first in the major and lastly in freshman English.) All decisions involving faculty were made within the College structure, with little or no consultation with the English faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences (the undergraduate men's college). This separation, which was social as well as professional, often resulted in ill feeling between the two departments. Almost all of us who were exposed to it for more than a few years welcomed the union of the two which occurred in the mid-80s when we became one department housed in Norman Mayer. Yet another anomaly was tenure. Ostensibly there was a tenure process, but in practice it was ignored because it was seldom of any interest to faculty in the kind of job market then prevalent. I never applied for tenure and never received any notice that it had been granted. I just assumed after seven years that I had it. If there was a formal decision, it was made not by means of the elaborate system now in place, but by the College's executive committee, which consisted entirely of chairs. If your chair remembered to bring you up for tenure, and was in favor of the idea, the committee went along.

What were the working conditions for young professors in those days?

Junior faculty faced a heavy 4-4 teaching load and low salaries. Junior faculty who had families often also taught at night and during the summer, with the result that there was very little time or energy left for research and writing. There often seemed no way out of this bind, since it took publication to get the promotions that would raise salary beyond that requiring supplementing by extra teaching. I was fortunate, however, in that my first wife and I had no children and in that she was working like a demon on her dissertation. I had a routine of teaching only in the morning, doing research and writing in the afternoon, and preparing classes and grading papers in the evening—this for six days a week. Also fortunately, I was young, had lots of ambition, and was deeply interested in the scholarly work I was engaged in. I should finally also note that I was lucky in arriving at Tulane during the late 1950s. The university was attempting to move from its former status as a haven for Southern young men and women not much interested in the life of the mind to that of a major graduate center and research university. So if a faculty member did respond to the expectations present in this revised sense of Tulane's mission, the encouragement and rewards were there. I was soon teaching graduate classes, had several research leaves, and was rapidly promoted. By 1964 (seven years after my arrival) I was a full professor, had been awarded a

Guggenheim, and had published two books and many articles.

I'd like to hear more about the university as a "haven for Southern young men and women." What was it like teaching—or, for that matter, living—under racial segregation? And what do you recall about the coming of integration to the campus?

Since I had been raised in the North and West and then had served in the integrated US Army, I was unprepared for segregation. My wife and I had trouble getting used to it and made all kinds of minor errors, such as trying to buy opera tickets for the section of the Municipal Auditorium reserved for blacks and attempting to drink from the water fountain designated for blacks in the Howard-Tilton library. The faculty was largely not Southern in background and constantly petitioned the Board of Administrators for integration, especially when Tulane remained the last segregated university in the country. The Board, whatever their private sentiments, publicly claimed that they were bound by the wills establishing Tulane and Newcomb as white-only institutions. But the Board finally gave in sometime in the mid-60s when the Federal Department of Education threatened to withhold all federal funding to segregated institutions. The first two blacks admitted were graduate students in Social Work and English, and the young woman in English eventually earned a Tulane Ph.D. in English.

Let me return to the English Department. Can you tell us about some of the major changes in addition to the ones you already indicated?

The principal changes during my time have been in faculty diversity and in curriculum. In 1957 the combined Arts and Sciences and Newcomb English departments contained two women and of course no racial minorities. There were several gay men but they kept a very low personal profile until tenure and often afterwards as well. The department as a whole shared a powerful thirst. I was used to the consumption of alcohol but not to the extent I found among Tulane faculty in the 50s. I can recall several clear instances of alcoholism and at least two deaths connected with drinking. I later came to believe that most of this heavy consumption was related to service in the officer corps during WWII; a number of my senior colleagues simply never stopped drinking a great deal despite the end of the war a decade earlier.

The curriculum was far more structured during my early Tulane decades. At Newcomb, two years of

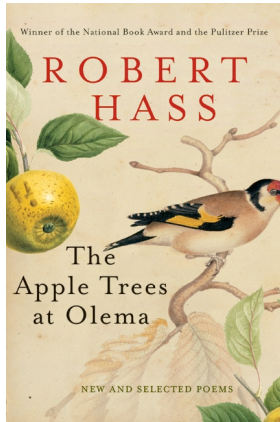
Cont. on Page 4

A poster for a lecture by Michael Ondaatje. At the top left is a small black and white portrait of Ondaatje. To the right of the portrait, the text reads "GREAT WRITERS SERIES" in red, followed by "MICHAEL ONDAATJE" in large black letters. Below this, it says "AUTHOR OF THE ENGLISH PATIENT" in white text on a blue background. Further down, the event details are listed: "DIXON HALL TULANE UNIVERSITY OCTOBER 25, 2010 7:00 PM (DOORS OPEN AT 6PM)". At the bottom, it states "THE EVENT IS FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC." and includes the Tulane University logo and a small line of text: "THIS EVENT IS SPONSORED BY THE CREATIVE WRITING FUND OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AT TULANE UNIVERSITY."

A poster for a lecture by James Salter. The background is yellow. On the left, there is a circular inset with a black and white photo of Salter. To the right, the name "JAMES SALTER" is written in green inside a white circle with a green border. Below the name, the event details are listed: "6:00 PM WEDNESDAY 10 Nov 2010 KENDALL CRAM ROOM LAVIN-BERNICK CENTER TULANE UNIVERSITY FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC". At the bottom, it says "For more information: 504 865-5160" and includes the Tulane University logo and a small line of text: "SPONSORED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH CREATIVE WRITING FUND".

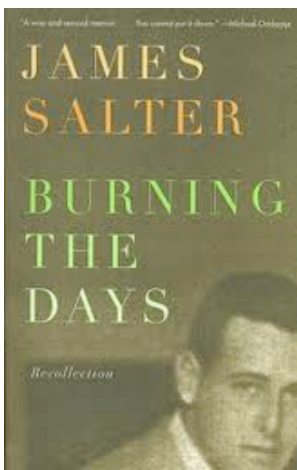
A poster for a lecture by Jean-Michel Rabaté. The background is orange. At the top, the name "JEAN-MICHEL RABATÉ" is written in blue, followed by "PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH DAVID COOPER AUSTIN LEE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA" in smaller blue text. Below this, the title "BECKETT'S ANIMAL PHILOSOPHIES 'THINK, PIG!'" is written in large, bold, yellow letters. At the bottom, the event details are listed: "200B NORMAN MAYER 2PM FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 19". At the very bottom, it says "SPONSORED BY TULANE CENTER FOR SCHOLARS NEWCOMB COLLEGE INSTITUTE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH DEPARTMENT OF FRENCH AND ITALIAN" and includes the Tulane University logo.

what we're reading



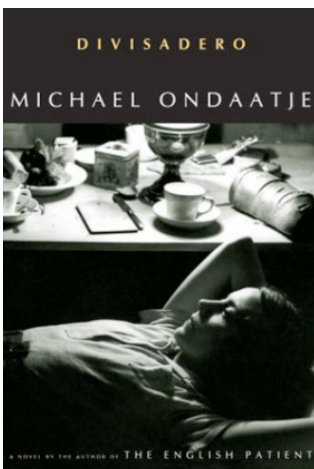
Robert Hass

The Apple Trees at Olema



James Salter

Burning the Days



Michael Ondaatje

Divisadero

Pizer - Cont. English were required of all students whatever their majors, and the English major required courses in Milton and Shakespeare and had strict period requirements as well. There were some electives, but not many. I always believed that E. D. Hirsch, who has written extensively on the cultural benefits of a shared core of intellectual experience, must have come out of a program of the kind we had then. In any case, though I had read most of the canon while a student, I didn't come to understand it beyond the standard commentary until I taught it.

You've touched on Tulane's ambitions, in the early years of your service, to become a major research university. Can you tell us something about your own development as a teacher and scholar?

The UCLA English department during the years I was an undergraduate and graduate student had an extremely orthodox notion of literary studies, the orthodoxy of that day being the study of literature as a form of intellectual history. I did learn of the New Criticism but only from casual reading and from conversations with junior faculty, not from my professors, and my dissertation, I now realize, though an excellent example of its kind, was almost bereft of textual analysis. It was teaching literature to freshmen that stimulated me to move beyond the text as a historical document. Teaching Lear in relation to the Great Chain of Being cut no ice in the face of their indifference to this approach, and I had to learn to tackle that work (and all the other great works we taught in that course and in the British literature year then required of sophomores) in a different way if I were to have any chance of interesting this level of student. After four years of this effort, I got a sufficient handle on how to teach literature as an art form capable of engaging the mind and spirit to feel better about what I was doing. The effort also affected my writing. I now moved beyond the strictly research and intellectual history basis of my initial publications to the mix of historical context and close reading that I have since largely pursued.

For the most part I remained distant from the drift of the profession, beginning in the 70s, initially toward theory and then toward cultural studies. I felt that the first was over-concerned with the philosophical roots of expression and belief, and that the second too closely resembled anthropology without the field work. I decided that if my interests had been in philosophy and anthropology, I would have gone into one of those fields rather than literary studies, and so I remained someone whose focus was on the historical and critical study of the traditional canon. Also, I believed that the impact of cultural studies on literature departments would tend toward the destruction of whatever coherence was present in the common study of a common literary heritage. So I developed into something of a fossil, critically speaking, doing my own thing (as Emerson advised) and occasionally also firing

off a blast at those pursuing false Gods—as in my “Bad Critical Writing” essay of about ten years ago.

What did your research focus on? And how did you proceed?

My work is identified by most American literature scholars almost entirely with American literary naturalism. This is not the result of my having restricted myself to that area but because I have written many books and articles both about specific figures in the movement and about its general characteristics from the 1890s to the recent past. This publication has an almost too neat bifurcation in that my interest in a specific writer produced a book devoted to that writer's work, while my attempts to define tendencies in the movement as a whole have been limited to articles—God's plenty of articles, one might say, since it has taken three books to collect them and there are still quite a number uncollected.

My books on Hamlin Garland, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, and John Dos Passos tend to be genetic studies. That is, I began each by a close study of the writer's literary estate as preserved at a research library and proceeded from there to influences, composition history, and so on. These are very much in the traditional method of archival, biographical, and historical research as a means toward understanding the work itself. They have a fair share of literary criticism, but except perhaps for the Dos Passos book, not as much as there might be. The articles, on the other hand, are based on a close reading of one to three works as a basis of saying something about American naturalism in general.

What do you consider your most significant contributions to literary studies?

It is sometimes said that if a scholar has one good fresh idea early in his career, he can build the remainder of his career on that idea. This is perhaps partly true in my case, that part being my very early realization that American literary history and criticism had taken the wrong path in attempting to explain American naturalism almost entirely as an offshoot of French naturalism. There was only a superficial resemblance between the two, I realized, and I therefore devoted a good deal of energy in my early writing to correcting this notion by pointing out the distinctive American characteristics of the American phase of the movement. This position is now widely accepted, and I have of course moved on to other ideas about American naturalism, but in any case this is how I made my initial impact as a scholar.

I have in fact written a good deal about other phases of American literature but never as fully as in my naturalism work, which is another reason why I am identified largely with it. I have a book on American expatriate writing about Paris in the 1920s and 30s that came out of my frequent family visits to France beginning in the late 60s. I have written a

considerable number of polemic articles about issues in modern textual editing, this arising from my own experience as an editor. I even have a series of articles about the 1920s American writers of fantasy—Elinor Wylie and James Branch Cabell principally—these because I always enjoyed their fiction and found little criticism about it.

Since you became an internationally renowned scholar of American literature, I suppose you must have received employment offers from other universities. Were you ever tempted to seek greener pastures?

Many of the productive English department colleagues of my early days at Tulane—Richard H. Fogle, Irving Ribner, and Robert Lumiansky, for example—took positions at more distinguished research institutions. I certainly didn't plan to remain, but circumstances always pushed me in that direction. (Perhaps I was a character in a naturalist novel!) My first marriage ended in 1961, and I was soon having too good a time as a young bachelor in a setting ideally suited for that role to consider moving to Podunk. Then I married a young woman raised in the city whose family was still here, and there was always that pull to remain. And then I got too old to be considered a good catch by another university. There were always offers, two of which I seriously considered—an endowed professorship at the University of Southern California, which would have returned me to Los Angeles, and a professorship at the University of Wisconsin, long a leader in graduate American literature education. But in the end I declined both, and was eventually, despite Katrina, glad that I did so.

By the time of Katrina you were retired. Most former professors leave New Orleans, but you stayed put. Would you like to comment on your retirement and subsequent events?

After over 40 years of teaching, I began to realize that I was tired of that phase of academia except for my life-long work with graduate students. (I have directed over 30 doctoral dissertations, the first in 1967, the last in 2004.) Perhaps this fatigue was in part the result of having helped raise three children through and beyond adolescence and discovering that nevertheless there was (so to speak) a fresh crop at my doorstep every year. In any case, I retired in 2001. This freed me to complete several major projects; indeed, for the first few years after retirement I found myself working too hard, since I had more time and energy for what I wished to do. Since retiring, I have published six editions, ten articles, and one critical study. Perhaps most noteworthy among these are my two editions in the ongoing Dreiser Edition and my American Naturalism and the Jews, all published by the University of Illinois Press. I have recently become interested in the relationship between naturalism and the visual arts and have underway several articles on the subject.

I have always, except when abroad, worked in an office or library faculty study, and thanks to the good will of a series of department chairs have continued to do so after my retirement from teaching. If you don't know who I am, you will recognize me as the old codger in the blue rain hat who can be found in the halls at odd times. ♦

events

jan	Poet Laureate Series Robert Hass 7pm Jan 24, 2011 Dixon Hall Tulane University
mar	Josephine Gessner Ferguson Lecture Ian Baucom 6pm Mar 16, 2011 Freeman Auditorium Tulane University
	Special Guest Writer Alex Kuo Time TBA March 31, 2011 Room 200B Norman Mayer Tulane University

The English Department
Celebrates
Banned Books Week

[click here to see the entire gallery of our Banned Book posters](#)

MONDAY burn MILAY,
WEDNESDAY
WHITMAN,
FRIDAY FAULKNER.
Burn them to ashes,
then burn the ashes.
they burn at **Fahrenheit 451**
banned books week

CIVILIZATION
HAS NO NEED OF
NOBILITY
OR
HEROISM.
THESE THINGS ARE
SYMPTOMS
OF
POLITICAL
INEFFICIENCY
we believe in a BRAVE NEW WORLD
banned books week

Chair's News

Fall semester has been a joyous literary season, bookended by the Creative Writing Fund's Katrina Poetry Symposium, hosted by Peter Cooley, and the first annual departmental undergraduate literary conference. Pulitzer-prize winner Yusef Komunyaaka and his fellow poets, Nicole Cooley, Peter Cooley, Kay Murphy, Brenda Marie Osbey, Alison Pelegrin, Brad Richard, and Martha Serpas offered moving perspectives on the disaster and its aftermath on the fifth anniversary of the hurricane at the Poetry Symposium co-sponsored by the Poetry Society of America. Thanks to all who helped make this event such a success.

Booker prize-winning author Michael Ondaatje, our writer-in-residence, taught sixteen students in a course focused on four extraordinary books: John Ehle's *The Land Breakers*, John Berger's *Pig Earth*, William Maxwell's *So Long, See You Tomorrow*, and C. D. Wright's *One Big Self*. He also guest-taught an introductory creative writing workshop and the advanced fiction writing workshop. His reading at the Great Writers Series included some of his early poetry as well as passages from his last published novel, *Divisadero*. Be on the lookout for his next novel, soon to arrive, *Cat's Table*. As Iagnippe, the lively Linda Spalding accompanied Michael, so we had a chance to become more familiar with her work, including the acclaimed *Who Named the Knife*. Linda and Michael quickly made themselves at home here, attending a number of events hosted by the department and the University. We are grateful to the many people who helped make them welcome.

One very special event made possible in part by members of our department was the HBO-sponsored evening with *Treme* writers David Simon, and Eric Overby: this event was hosted by Nghana Lewis and moderated by Joel Dinerstein, and featured a fine spoken word performance by Gian Smith.

The Creative Writing Fund also sponsored Writer's Writer James Salter, who read his new story "Charisma" and charmed everyone with his dry wit. Mr. Salter also guest-taught one of our creative writing courses. The Zale-Kemmerling poet, Brenda Hillman, visited poetry classes and read to a large appreciative audience; her reading included a poem of transliterated birdsong by Romantic poet John Clare and closed with a pair of her own related poems.

Another highlight of the fall term: Oxford don Robert Douglas-Fairhurst gave the Pierce Butler Chair public lecture on Dickens' work, working out a thesis from biographical information on Dickens' stylistic and thematic preference for digression. Professor Douglas-Fairhurst guest-taught the graduate seminar in 19th-century literature. Those of you interested in Victorian literary studies should note the upcoming

publication of his new book on Henry Mayhew's work. Thanks to Pierce Butler Professor Barry Ahearn for arranging this extremely well-attended and intriguing lecture.

The department, with funding from the SLA Center for Scholars and the Newcomb College Institute, co-sponsored two other major events. Professor Jean-Michel Rabate, University of Pennsylvania, delivered "Think, Pig! Beckett's Animal Philosophies" to a full house in November, and led a seminar for faculty and graduate students on the future of literary theory. Dr. Patricia Gherovici, winner of the Gradiva Award in Historical, Cultural, and Literary Analysis and the 2004 Boyer Prize for Contributions to Psychoanalytic Anthropology for her book *The Puerto Rican Syndrome*, spoke about her new book *Please Select Your Gender: From the Invention of Hysteria to the Democratizing of Transgenderism* at an event co-sponsored with the New Orleans-Birmingham Psychoanalytic Center.

The Debate Education Society held two more regional debate tournaments for middle-school students this fall: the debate project is now being used by the National Middle School Debate League as the model for other similar programs at Harvard and Stanford University. Congratulations to Ryan McBride and the students and faculty who contribute so much to this program. Joel Dinerstein and his colleagues in the American Studies workshop held another series of stimulating talks. Rebecca Mark's new senior capstone course inaugurated an online undergraduate journal in concert with its undergraduate literary conference: we look forward to seeing *Second Line* online this spring. We awarded the Boyette Prize for the most distinguished freshman essay to Hokan Holmquist, and the runner-up to Jessica Hatch.

We are looking forward to Robert Hass's Poet Laureate evening in late January, and Alex Kuo's reading in late March. Our annual Josephine Gessner Ferguson lecture, always held in March, will bring Professor Ian Baucom of Duke University for a public lecture. We owe special thanks to Barb Ryan, Arynne Sherouse, Nicole Nolan, David Ewens, Holland Phillips, and program coordinator Laura Lecorgne.



Click here to see the latest awards and achievements of our post-doctoral fellows

Were you a Tulane English Major? Send us your news!

award-winning student writing

Boyette Prize Winners

Spring 2010

Jari Honora

"Scapegoating the Past, Sacrificing the Present"

Peter Tzioumis

"The Importance of Family"

Fall 2010

Hokan Holmquist

"Sophocles and the Supreme Court"

Jessica Hatch

"What Wasn't The Hipster?"

Our thanks to:

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Ashlie Sponenberg - Publications Coordinator

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